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ABSTRACT

As the 21st century rapidly approaches, America will be directly confronted with the reality that its nationwide public education system has failed to adequately and accurately train its future generation of citizens. Socioeconomic status and race have been implicated as the two biggest factors related to dropping out. Current researchers have declared that there is an overall need for more comprehensive and improved data related to youth employment. This study evaluated the impact of a jobs program for at-risk high school students. Students (N=77) from three New York City high schools completed a questionnaire which assessed student demographics; the types of jobs held by students; their relationships with co-workers and supervisors; school and program support; and the impact of their jobs on students' perceptions of their skills, academic studies, and school attendance. The majority of the students were female; the students were primarily minorities, especially Hispanics; and students represented grades 9 through 12. The results suggest that male students are particularly at-risk, that some sex-role stereotyping of job-related courses may exist, and that high school students need more challenging jobs. Future research should continue to monitor sex differences as they relate to dropout behavior. Programs similar to this job program should be encouraged. Students earned needed funds, learned skills that would be an asset in the future, and learned how to interact successfully with co-workers and supervisors. References and 10 tables are appended. (Author/ABL)

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THE DROPOUT PREVENTION INITIATIVE JOBS PROGRAM:

PERCEPTIONS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the impact of a Jobs Program for at-risk high school students. Seventy-seven students from three New York City high schools completed a questionnaire which assessed student demographics; the types of jobs held by students; their relationships with co-workers and supervisors; school and program support and the impact of their jobs on students' perceptions of their skills, academic studies, and school attendance. The majority of the students were female; the students were primarily minorities, especially hispanics; and students represented grades nine through twelve. Results suggested that male students were particularly at-risk, that some sex-role stereotyping of job-related courses may exist and that high school students need more challenging jobs. The paper concludes by discussing the implications of these results and the need for future research on minority youth and employment.

THE DROPOUT PREVENTION INITIATIVE JOBS PROGRAM:

EFFECTS ON AT-RISK STUDENTS

As the 21st century rapidly approaches, America will be directly confronted with the reality that its nation-wide public educational system has failed to adequately and accurately train its future generation of citizens. Researchers have reported that 25% of American fifth graders will not successfully complete high school (Mann, 1987). In addition, socioeconomic status and race have been described as "the two background characteristics that are most strongly related to dropping out." Specifically, research has shown that students from a lower socioeconomic status tend to have higher dropout rates and dropout behavior tends to occur more frequently among hispanics than blacks (Ekstrom et al., 1987). Research has suggested that the dropout rate among blacks is 40 percent greater than whites and the dropout rate among hispanics is 250 percent greater than whites (Mann, 1987). The most common reasons cited by students for dropping out are school-related, job-related, and family-related issues. Sex differences have also been related to dropout behaviors with males constituting 54% of the dropout population (Mann, 1987). Research has also shown that being retained in school increases the risk of dropping out. It has been indicated that a student who is one year over age for grade will have a 40-50 percent chance of dropping out later. This increases to 90 percent for a student who is two years over age for grade (Mann, 1987). However, crucial to this study is the research which suggests that employment, during high school, is a contributing factor to dropout behavior (Ekstrom et al., 1987).

In the 1970's, blue-ribbon commissions, along with the President's Scientific Advisory Committee, expressed concern for the "signs of increasing social deviance and lack of motivation among the young" (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). It was recommended that adolescent involvement, in the world of work, become a "high priority" (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986). Researchers later found that part-time employment, averaging 20 hours per week, may have had a negative impact upon adolescent schooling. That is, (1) employment appeared to promote delinquent behavior, (2) high-stress jobs led to higher rates of drug and alcohol use, and (3) employment tended to cultivate the development of negative attitudes towards work (Greenberger & Steinberg, 1986).

Current researchers have declared that there is an overall need for more comprehensive and improved data related to youth employment. Orr (1987), for example, discussed job employment and training programs that were developed to encourage dropouts to complete their high school education. Studies of these programs showed that having a job did not reduce attendance, but neither was it a sufficient incentive to keep students in school. These training programs were off-site and Orr concludes that the lack of attention given to improving students' basic skills is a possible explanation for the program's minimal impact on students' achievement in school. This points to the necessity of obtaining students' perceptions of the academic supports while they are in part-time jobs. Moreover, a mutual set of measures regarding (1) employment, (2) reasons for employment, (3) the multiple dimensions of student employment experiences, and (4) attitudinal and behavioral outcomes of employment is required (Charner et al., 1988).

Additional research has shown that adolescent males work in lower status, yet higher paying jobs than their female counterparts. These results illustrate that occupational status and wage inequities begin to occur during adolescence (Meyer, 1987). Further research has focused on vocational programs and their sex-role stereotyping (Virginia State Department of Education, 1986). Researchers have studied the vocational enrollment patterns, among male and female students, at both the secondary and postsecondary (Community College) level. It was found that men were not pursuing "women's" fields due to the low pay and the stigma caused by sex-role stereotyping (Virginia State Department of Education, Richmond, 1986).

The Dropout Prevention Initiative Jobs Program

The Dropout Prevention Initiative Project (D.P.I.) included a job experience program for high school students as one of its components. The D.P.I. paid minimum wages to students who work part-time in jobs that have been located by a program Job Coordinator or Job Developer. The Coordinator was also responsible for providing counseling to students participating in the program. Students, who were considered to be at-risk, were selected to participate in the Jobs Program. Participants included two types of students: 1) those who had been Long Term Absentees (LTA's) yet had returned to school and 2) students who had been attending school, but were highly vulnerable to adopting behavior patterns which could lead to dropping out. The D.P.I. Project expected that student employment, at 15 hours per week, would have a positive effect on students' attitudes toward school and on their school attendance.

Method

Subjects

Subjects for this study were selected from 3 out of 13 D.P.I. high schools. These three schools were identified by the New York City Board of Education as having a fully implemented Jobs Program at the beginning of the 1987-88 school year.

A total of 77 students participated in this study, 66% were female and 34% were male. Students ranged in age from 15 to 20 years old, with an average age of 17. The majority (63%) of students were in the 11th and 12th grades. As can be seen in Table 1, 84% of the students in the sample were minority group members. Students were primarily hispanic (45% of the 77 students), non-hispanic blacks (27%), and hispanic blacks (12%) (see Table 1).

Insert Table 1 about here

Design/Instrument

A 38-item student questionnaire was constructed to study the Jobs Program and its effectiveness on academic performance and school attendance. Questions were devised to include both open and closed-ended items. Items on the questionnaire addressed student demographics, the types of jobs held by students and their relationships with co-workers and supervisors. Other topics covered included students' attitudes towards and satisfaction with their job placement, students' perceptions of what they had learned from their experience, and how their jobs had affected their academic studies and school attendance. Students' perceptions of academic supports, job-related feedback and support from D.P.I. Program Staff were also assessed.

Procedure

A black female graduate student administered the questionnaires in the three selected high schools. Appointments were pre-arranged with the Jobs Coordinator at each of the three schools. Students were excused from their classes to participate in the study. Questionnaires were usually administered to small groups of students in 40-minute class periods. All items were read aloud to students who were encouraged to raise any questions they might have had. The researcher continued to visit each high school until all program participants had completed the questionnaire. Thus, the final sample consisted of almost all students who were participating in the program at the three schools at the time of data collection.

Results

Job Characteristics

Most students were earning $3.35 an hour, minimum wage. Eighty percent of the students held jobs off-site. The remaining students in the sample worked at their high school. The types of jobs students held can be classified into three categories--"people," "data," and "things." "People" jobs included working as a teaching assistant, a tutor, admitting patients or serving as an advocate. Students who were doing clerical work or working with computers were classified as having "data" jobs. Finally, "things" jobs included jobs in which students worked as cashiers, maintenance personnel, messengers, short-order cooks, stockboys, and animal caretakers. Sixty-four percent of the students in this sample had "data" jobs, 22% had "people" jobs, and 14% had "things" jobs (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Eighty-two percent of the students indicated that it took them 30 minutes or less to travel to work; most of these students only traveled 15 minutes. Ninety-six percent of the students indicated that their travel time to work was "okay." Nearly half of the students (48%) were within walking distance of their place of employment.

Two-thirds of the students indicated that they never worked more than the required 15 hours per week. Fifteen percent of the students indicated that they sometimes worked overtime and 19% indicated that they often worked overtime.

Sex by Grade

An analysis of sex by grade showed that even though the number of male and female students was about equal in the 9th and 10th grades, by the 11th and 12th grades the number of female students in the Jobs Program outnumbered male students (see Table 3).

Insert Table 3 about here

The trend was such that female students outnumbered male students in a ratio of 3:1 in the 11th grade and 5:2 in the 12th grade. Explanations for this finding could be: (1) that there are fewer males than females in the high schools in our sample, (2) that male students, as compared to female students, did not meet minimum requirements for the Jobs Program; and (3) fewer male students chose to participate in the program. In any case, these statistics suggest that male students are at-risk for dropping out of high school.

Age for Grade Level

As can be seen in Table 4, the majority of students (62%) were at grade level for age, $X^2(15, N=73) = 51.62, p < .001$.

Insert Table 4 about here

Of the remaining 27 students, results indicated that 20 (27% of the original sample) were one year over age for grade, four were two years over age for grade, and three were three or four years over age for grade. Thus, most students were either at their grade level for age or one year below their grade level for age.

School and Program Support of Students in the D.P.I. Jobs Program

Students were asked both about courses that had prepared them for their jobs and about job counseling. Fifty-two percent of the students indicated that they had courses in school which prepared them for their jobs; these included word processing, typing, computer training, math and record/bookkeeping. Male and female students were equally likely to indicate that computers, math and record/bookkeeping were courses that had prepared them for their job, but this was not true of typing and word processing. The trend was such that a greater proportion of the female students than of male students indicated that they had had word processing or typing courses which had prepared them for their job.

A little over half of the students indicated that they had received job counseling. School staff cited most often by the students as providing job-related counseling were the Jobs Coordinator and the school Guidance Counselor. Teachers and the Job Developer also provided counseling.

Student Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction With Their Jobs

Students on the whole (83%) were satisfied with their jobs. The most common reasons students gave for their satisfaction were: (1) they liked the site, (2) felt challenged (e.g., gained experience, learned about procedures, had interesting work to do, were kept busy), (3) liked the people that they worked with or for, and (4) liked the salary (see Table 5a).

Insert Table 5a about here

Eighty-four percent of the students also indicated that they were learning skills on their job that would be useful in the future. Students said that they were gaining experience and responsibility, were learning new things, were working in the area of their future career, and were learning to work with both children and adults.

As can be seen in Table 5b, though the majority of students were satisfied with their jobs, students dissatisfaction was greater when they had "things" jobs.

Insert Table 5b about here

The major reason students gave for dissatisfaction with their jobs was that their job was not challenging enough. Forty-six percent of responses given by students for their dissatisfaction with their job fell into this category. Other reasons given for dissatisfaction included inadequate salary, the supervisor's poor relationship with workers, the work seemed like "job slavery" and the combination of employment and academic studies created fatigue and a long school day.

Students' Sex by How Money Is Being Used

Students indicated that they were working to meet their needs and the needs of their family. Fifty percent of the students stated that they were working to meet both their needs and the needs of their family. Forty-seven percent said that they were working to meet just their own needs. Male students, as compared to female students, were more likely to be working to meet both their needs and the needs of their family; $X^2(2, N=70) = 5.25, p < .10$ (see Table 6).

Insert Table 6 about here

Students' Relationship with Boss and Co-Workers

Students were asked about their relationship with supervisors and co-workers. Over three-quarters of the students said that they got along well or very well with their boss; the mean = 4.38 on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = "poor" and 5 = "very well." Similarly, the majority (81%) of students stated that they got along well or very well with their co-workers; the mean = 4.51 on a five-point Likert scale where 1 = "poor" and 5 = "very well" (see Tables 7 and 8).

Insert Tables 7 and 8 about here

Boss Views Work

When asked how their boss viewed their work, 61% of the students indicated that their boss maintained a good to excellent view of their work. Twenty percent said that their boss felt that their work was okay

and 6% or four of the seventy-seven students indicated that their boss had a poor view of their work (see Table 9).

Insert Table 9 about here

It is interesting to note that 14% of the students said that they didn't know how their boss viewed their work. These last results suggest that some students may require more feedback from their employer in regards to work performance.

Effect of Having a Job

Fifty-four percent of the students indicated that because they had a job, they would want to work harder in school. Forty-two percent said that they would want to work about the same. Only three students indicated that they would want to work less. Thus, in the students' eyes, having a job either had a positive impact or no impact on their academic motivation. For this sample, then, having a job did not detract from students' motivation to work in school.

Effect of No Jobs Program

When asked what they would have done if there had not been a Jobs Program, over half of the students (57%) indicated that they would have attended school about the same amount. Further analysis showed that males were more likely to say that they would have attended school less if there had not been a Jobs Program; $X^2(2, N=75) = 10.72$, $p < .001$ (see Table 10).[1]

[1]Data on attendance and achievement for students in the D.P.I. Program are forthcoming from the N.Y.C. Board of Education and will be included in future analyses.

Insert Table 10 about here

Conclusion

Researchers found that minority male students were particularly at-risk:

- by the 11th and 12th grades, the number of male students was substantially less than the number of female students participating in the Jobs Program;
- male students were more likely to say that they were working to meet both their needs and the needs of their family;
- male students indicated that they would have attended school less if there had not been a Jobs Program.

This lends support to the idea that male students may drop out of school when the need to support their families competes with their academic studies. As discussed earlier in this paper, this may be particularly true for males who are not succeeding in school. A nation-wide longitudinal study of dropouts indicated that 36% of the students surveyed gave work or family-related issues as their primary reasons for leaving school. Minority males may continue to leave school unless this problem is addressed. Finding viable solutions to this problem is especially important given that the minority population in the United States is steadily increasing, lack of schooling limits job options in the long-run, and that restricted job options have a severe impact on the individual, his family and society as a whole. Future research should continue to monitor sex differences as they relate to dropout behavior. Research should particularly focus on the disproportionate dropout rate among hispanic male students.

Female students were more likely than male students to identify typing or word processing courses taken in school as preparing them for their jobs. This may indicate the need to look more closely at the way male and female students either choose or are placed into courses that may determine future career options. The fact that women continue to earn less on the dollar than men makes this issue a serious concern. Sex-role stereotyping, as it relates to employment, is an area which still needs to be addressed.

Students in this sample were acutely affected by their work environment. These high school youth seemed eager to work in job settings that were not designed to be too easy, that did not compete with their school work, that paid more than the minimum wage, and that provided them with constructive feedback about their job-related skills. Further support for the inference that jobs need to be more challenging for youth is that the majority (62%) of students indicated that their current job would not be a future career.

About half the students indicated that they had not received job counseling at school. In order for a jobs program to be really effective, a relationship should exist between employers and the schools. Skills taught in school should enhance the students' school achievement, job performance, and his/her ability to enter the labor market after graduation. On the other hand, skills learned in appropriate job settings illustrate to students the ties that exist between education and work.

Program efforts similar to that of the D.P.I. Program should be encouraged to continue. Students earned needed funds, learned skills that

would be an asset in the future, and learned how to interact successfully with co-workers and supervisors. Students indicated that their jobs either enhanced or at least did not detract from their academic studies. However, students expressed the need for more challenging jobs that could meet both their needs and the needs of their family.

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Table 1

Racial Composition of Students

Race	Frequency	Percent
Hispanic	34	45.3
Non-hispanic black	20	26.7
Hispanic black	9	12.0
Caucasian	5	6.7
Other	5	6.7
Hispanic white	2	2.7
TOTAL	75[a]	100.0

[a]Two students did not indicate their race.

Table 2

Contingency Table of Students' Sex by Type of Job

	Type of Job[a]				
Sex	People	Data	Things	Totals	(%)
Male	3	14	5	22	(32.4)
Female	12	28	6	46	(67.6)
Totals	15	42	11	68	
(%)	(22.1)	(61.8)	(16.2)		

[a]People jobs included working as a teaching assistant, tutor, admitting patients or serving as an advocate. Data jobs included clerical work and working with computers. Things jobs included cashiers, maintenance personnel, messengers, short order cooks, stock boys, and animal caretakers.

Table 3

Contingency Table of Students' Sex by Grade

	Student Grade					
Sex	9	10	11	12	Totals	(%)
Male	2	11	5	8	26	(34.7)
Female	3	12	14	20	49	(65.3)
Totals	5	23	19	28	75	
(%)	(6.7)	(30.7)	(25.3)	(37.3)		

Table 4

Age for Grade Level

	Grade					
Level[a]	9	10	11	12	Totals	%
At Grade Level	3	5	15	23	46	(63.0)
1 year above age for grade	2	11	3	4	20	(27.4)
2 years above age for grade	0	2	1	1	4	(5.5)
3 years above age for grade	0	2	0	0	2	(2.7)
4 years above age for grade	0	1	0	0	1	(1.4)
Totals	5	21	19	28	73	
%	(6.8)	(28.8)	(26.0)	(38.3)		

[a]Calculations are based on considering 14 and 15 as the appropriate age for 9th grade, 15 and 16 years for 10th grade, 16 and 17 years for 11th grade, and 17 and 18 years for the 12th grade.

Note: For the contingency table of age by grade $X^2(15, N = 73) = 51.62$, $p < .001$.

Table 5a

Student Satisfaction with Job

Type of Job[a]	Reasons Given for Satisfaction: Challenging Job	Liked Supervisors, Coworkers and/or Clients	Salary	Liked Job Site	Total[b] N	(% Expressing Satisfaction)[c]
People	2	4	1	6	14	(92.8)
Data	13	10	0	12	40	(87.5)
Things	1	0	1	2	9	(44.4)
Totals[d]	16	14	2	20	63	
(%)[e]	(30.8)	(26.9)	(3.8)	(38.5)		

[a]People jobs included working as a teaching assistant, tutor, admitting patients or serving as an advocate. Data jobs included clerical work and working with computers. Things jobs included cashiers, maintenance personnel, messengers, short order cooks, stock boys, and animal caretakers.

[b]These totals are based on the 63 responses of the students who stated their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs.

[c]Percentages for each job category are based on the number of responses from students who expressed satisfaction with their job for that particular job category.

[d]These totals are based on the 52 responses of the students who expressed satisfaction with their job.

[e]These percentages are based on the 52 responses of the students who expressed satisfaction with their job.

Table 5b

Student Dissatisfaction with Job

Type of Job[a]	Reasons Given for Dissatisfaction: Job Lacked Challenge	Long work/ school day	Workers dislike supervisor	Insufficient salary	Dislike job location	Dislike job/ slavery	Total N[b]	(% Expressing Dissatisfaction)[c]
People	1	0	0	0	0	0	14	(7.1)
Data	3	1	1	0	0	0	40	(12.5)
Things	1	0	0	2	1	1	9	(55.6)
Totals[d]	5	1	1	2	1	1	63	
(%)[e]	(45.5)	(9.1)	(9.1)	(18.2)	(9.1)	(9.1)		

[a] People jobs included working as a teaching assistant, tutor, admitting patients or serving as an advocate. Data jobs included clerical work and working with computers. Things jobs included cashiers, maintenance personnel, messengers, short order cooks, stock boys, and animal caretakers.

[b] These totals are based on the 63 responses of the students who stated their reasons for satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their jobs.

[c] Percentages for each job category are based on the number of responses from students who expressed dissatisfaction with their jobs for that particular job category.

[d] These totals are based on the 11 responses of the students who expressed dissatisfaction with their job.

[e] These percentages are based on the 11 responses of the students who expressed dissatisfaction with their job.

Table 6

Contingency Table of Sex by How Students Are Using Their Earnings

	How Students Are Using Their Earnings			
Sex	To meet own needs	To meet family's needs	To meet own needs and family's needs	Totals (%)
Male	9	2	15	26 (37.1)
Female	24	0	20	44 (62.9)
Totals	33	2	35	70
(%)	(47.1)	(2.9)	(50.0)	

Note: $X^2(2, N = 70) = 5.25, p < .10$

Table 7

Students' Perceptions of Their Relationship with Their Supervisor

Description of Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Poor	1	1.3
Fair	4	5.2
Okay	6	7.8
Well	20	26.0
Very well	46	59.7
TOTAL	77	100.0

Table 8

Students' Perceptions of Their Relationship with Their Coworkers

Description of Relationship	Frequency	Percent
Poor	2	2.6
Fair	0	0
Okay	5	6.5
Well	20	26.0
Very well	50	64.9
TOTAL	77	100.0

Table 9

Students' Perceptions of How Their Supervisor Views Their Work

Supervisor's View of Work	Frequency	Percent
Poor	4	5.6
Fair	0	0
Okay	14	19.7
Well/Good	21	29.6
Very well	22	31.0
Don't know	10	14.1
TOTAL	71[a]	100.0

[a] 6 students did not answer this question.

Table 10

Contingency Table of Sex by Impact on School Attendance

If There Had Not Been a Jobs Program

	Effect on School Attendance				
Sex	Attend School More	Attend School the Same	Attend School Less	Totals	(%)
Male	7	11	8	26	(34.7)
Female	15	32	2	49	(65.3)
Totals	22	43	10	75	
	(29.3)	(57.3)	(13.3)		

Note: $X^2(2, N = 75) = 10.72, p < .001$